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2 April 1975

DCI BRIEFING FOR  
2 APRIL WSAG MEETING

THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA

Vietnam

- I. Government control along the coastal strip of Military Region 2 has crumbled rapidly after the loss of DaNang.
  - A. The major central coastal cities of Qui Nhon and Nha Trang have been lost, and there are reports that territorial forces joined the Communists in attacks against the government defenders.
  - B. There are still small pockets of government presence in southern Military Region 2, but they will evaporate quickly.
    1. The status of Tuyen Duc, Ninh Thuan, and Binh Thuan provinces is unclear. The government had no regular army units in these three provinces, and provincial authorities reportedly have fled.
    2. The Military Region 2 Headquarters is said

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to be still functioning at Cam Ranh, although the regional commander and some of his senior staff have left. The Marine Division, which initially was sent to Cam Ranh from DaNang, has now gone to Vung Tau for regroupment.

C. There is no sign, as yet, that the evacuation-mentality that led to the collapse in the North has spread to government troops in Military Regions 3 and 4.

1. The military situation in these areas has been relatively quiet, although government commanders are expecting strong Communist attacks around the major delta cities of Can Tho and My Tho.

D. There are two ways the situation could now evolve:

1. There could be a stabilization of the situation in Military Regions 3 and 4. But even if this occurs, it will probably be only temporary until the Communists bring more military pressure to bear.
2. The process of demoralization and de-

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featism already underway could prove irreversible and lead quickly to the collapse of the GVN and its will to resist.

E. The debate and congressional action on the question of US aid to South Vietnam will be a key factor in the situation.

1. The provision of additional US aid would provide a psychological boost for the GVN's flagging morale.
2. The denial of aid would further deepen defeatism in South Vietnam and strengthen the already growing fear that a Communist victory is inevitable. It might also lead to a rise in anti-American sentiment. Such sentiment already appears to be running high among military units and refugees escaping from the north.

II. We lack firm evidence on the Communist timetable for military action in the provinces around Saigon and in the delta, but we believe that Hanoi intends to push its military advantage as forcefully and as rapidly as possible. The balance of forces in South Vietnam now has shifted decisively

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in Communist favor, and there are signs that additional North Vietnamese strategic reserve units are being moved into the country.

III. Given the fragility of the present military situation in South Vietnam and the rapid pace of events there, Thieu's political position is now highly vulnerable. Major political changes, as a prelude to a settlement of Communist terms, could occur at any time.

A. Rumors abound that various moves are afoot to replace Thieu or force him to resign the presidency. Attempts could occur at any time, and would probably be made by an individual or group of officers within the military.

B. The civilian opposition -- including figures such as General "Big" Minh and former premier Phan Huy Quat and individuals more closely associated with the government such as Senator Tran Van Lam and Deputy Prime Minister Dan are already beginning to maneuver for position.

1. Although these people are not likely to be prime movers in an early change of leadership, they would probably hope to play a role in selecting a successor for Thieu.

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- C. A decision by the An Quang Buddhist opposition, led by Tri Quang, to take to the streets in an all-out effort to force Thieu's removal is another strong possibility. Tri Quang may now see a transitional non-Communist government, dominated by the Buddhists, as the best and quickest way to protect Buddhist interests and reach some sort of accommodation with the Communists.
- D. But if the South Vietnamese military position is not stabilized in the immediate future, Saigon will face complete military collapse before a move to replace Thieu or an attempt to negotiate an end to the war can materialize.

IV. The tone of its propaganda and the speed with which it has redeployed its forces make it clear that Hanoi now sees military victory in its grasp. The North Vietnamese also clearly sense the possibility of a final demoralization and political collapse in the South, which would give them their final objectives without the cost of a major assault against Saigon.

- A. In an obvious effort to encourage a political upheaval in Saigon, the Communists have been

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reemphasizing their willingness to reopen negotiations once Thieu has been removed from power.

1. Recent Communist statements, however, make no mention of a coalition government, but declare only that new negotiations would result "in the speedy settlement of the affairs of South Vietnam."

- B. This terse offer reflects the radically altered strategic situation in Vietnam. Hanoi no longer sees the need for a lengthy intermediate state of negotiations and coalition rule in the South prior to the achievement of its basic objective -- the reintegration of Vietnam under Communist rule.

- C. Hanoi's shortened timetable in the South has obvious implications for the role of the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government. The North Vietnamese now have little incentive to promote the PRG as a separate political force ready to play a role in a Lao-style coalition government.

1. In this regard, Hanoi now faces a basic decision on whether or not to install a PRG capital in one of the major South

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Vietnamese cities now under Communist control. Failure to do so would indicate that the role of the PRG in North Vietnamese strategic thinking has been significantly downgraded.

2. Although North Vietnamese strategy probably still involves the establishment of a transitional southern government, perhaps with token participation by neutralist "third force" elements, it seems fairly clear that Hanoi is now interested in providing only the barest of fig leaves for a Communist takeover in the South.

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Cambodia

- V. In Cambodia, the government's military fortunes continue to slide downhill. It is difficult to see the situation holding together more than <sup>three</sup> ~~two~~ ~~on the outside~~ ~~few weeks~~.
- A. Communist forces yesterday overran the neighboring towns of Banam and Neak Luong, thereby eliminating the government's last foothold on the lower Mekong River.
1. A few survivors have reached Phnom Penh aboard navy boats, but it is doubtful that many more of the enclave's 4,400 former defenders will reach government lines.
  2. With the fall of Banam and Neak Luong, a significant portion of the 6,000 to 7,000 Communist troops in the area could now be deployed to the Phnom Penh area.
- B. Communist commanders around Phnom Penh yesterday began calling in units from several northern provinces for increased attacks, but it will take at least several days for them to arrive in the capital area and prepare for combat. It is clear, however, that the Communists

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have interpreted Lon Nol's departure as a sign of weakness on the government side, and are ready to push for a final military victory.

C. The Communist threat against Phnom Penh is already substantial.

1. Insurgent rocket crews have the range of vital facilities at Pochentong airport, and have fired over 30 rockets at the airfield in each of the past several days.
  - a. Ammunition shortages have apparently halted Communist artillery attacks against the airport, but they could resume at any time.
  - b. There is a clear danger that shellings could force an indefinite suspension of the airlift.
2. On the ground, government units on Monday closed a gap in the defense line north of the airfield, reducing the threat of a ground attack -- but at the cost of postponing the operation to retake Tuol Leap and eliminate Communist rocket and artillery sites in the area.
3. The anticipated threat southeast of the

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capital has developed, and government forces have been giving ground in the face of steady ground attacks. Communist units in this sector may soon be within heavy weapons range of the southern suburb of Takhmau.

4. The situation is not much better on the east bank of the Mekong River, where the insurgents have taken some riverside positions within sight of Phnom Penh's waterfront.

IV. Even if the Cambodian Army manages to stabilize the ground situation around the capital for the next week to ten days, the time is rapidly approaching when supply shortages will begin having a direct effect on government military capabilities.

- A. On April 11 parachutes and pallets will no longer be available in Thailand, and supply drops to isolated enclaves in Cambodia will have to be halted.
- B. On April 17 all ammunition earmarked for Cambodia will have been delivered. In-country stocks of some types of ammunition will be exhausted soon thereafter, and all ammunition will be gone by April 25.

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C. When the seriousness of the supply situation becomes apparent to army units, they may begin to lay down their arms. A two-week supply of ammunition is considered essential to prevent such a collapse of the army's will to resist, and some stocks will hit this critical point beginning on April 6.

VII. On the political front, Lon Nol's departure has had no immediate effect on government morale.

A. Most Cambodians -- including a good number of military commanders -- had come to view him as the major obstacle both to negotiations and to a favorable US Congressional vote on supplemental aid for Cambodia.

1. As a result, his departure appears to have been met with a feeling of relief and <sup>a hope</sup> ~~an expectation~~ that a compromise settlement short of total surrender to the Communists can now be arranged.
2. Sihanouk's naming of all key members of the recently reshuffled government as "war-criminals," however, along with the thrust of recently intercepted Communist messages, makes any breakthrough toward negotiations highly unlikely.

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3. Under these conditions, whatever hope exists in Phnom Penh will soon turn to dismay.
4. The end could come in several ways.
  - a. The military situation could collapse from overwhelming Communist pressure, from a disintegration of army morale, or from a combination of the two.
  - b. A complete political unravelling could occur, either by a military coup, a resignation of the government, or a total breakdown of control in Phnom Penh accompanied by widespread looting and rioting.
5. In any case, some sort of denouement is almost certain before the end of the month.

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